# Selecting for a Healthy Relationship between Californians and the Water that Sustains Them

Address to the California Water Plan 2013 Meeting of Tribal Advisory Committee and Public Advisory Committee

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Good afternoon, thank you for the honor of being your speaker for the 2013 Water Plan meeting with the Tribal and Public Advisory Committees. It is great to be here with you to celebrate another milestone in improving California's Water Plan. For me it is not much of a reach to have a goal for our agencies to strive for alignment in our priorities. Few of the 38 million Californians know any distinction between the Department of Water Resources and the State Water Resources Control Board, and frankly, few care. Isn't it interesting that the public presumes alignment and integration of water management, and much of our work that lies ahead relates to meeting this basic expectation of integrated water management, the theme of the Water Plan going back at least 8 years. Moving forward, we are faced with a very

basic choice – integration, or the opposite, which is disintegration of water resources.

*The philosophy of mimicking natural processes precedes the science of understanding them.* - Sir Albert Howard, agronomist, 1940

Sir Albert Howard was a visionary that understood the complexity of soil natural processes on which human society depends, and was a follower of Charles Darwin, who coined the term “natural selection” which is recognized as a law of biological systems, including engineered systems. As we set up our water management systems, what are we naturally selecting? What kind of Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) is manifest based on the criteria by which we evaluate funding proposals? Is it aligned with the natural water cycle and Tribal and other communities that depend on it?

Today I want to encourage the redoubling of our respective efforts to promote integrated water management, but cast this in a philosophical context of improving the relationship of Californians with water. I think we can all agree that relationships improve with understanding, listening, reflecting, and not with possessing, controlling, and dominating. With collaborating, not commanding.

Water's integrative characteristics

What are the systemic factors that prevent us in some parts of California from meeting clean water standards and having reliable water supplies? Water doesn't dinstinguish if it is High Sierra purity or if it's in the sludge drying beds, its physical properties remain the same. It evaporates, it falls as rain, it picks things up, and it drop things off, it sinks into the ground, it seeps out of the ground into watercourses, in runs off clay and rock, it runs through sand. It knows no political boundaries, it follows watershed boundaries. Natural mechanisms cleanse it of impurities so it is suitable for supporting aquatic life and people. Treatment processes copycat natural processes to support denser populations of people. By the time it reaches the sea or the groundwater basin, water has integrated everything in its path. I remind us of these things because water is an integrator of factors, and in order to properly manage it we need to get out in front of this integration, and ourselves integrate our management structure more effectively, at the state and federal levels, at the city and county level, at the subbasin level. We need to align water governance with the natural water cycle. We need to improve our relationship with water.

Dysfunctional and Healthy Relationships

Let's ask ourselves, honestly, does our community have a healthy relationship with water? Or is it a dysfunctional relationship with water? To answer this I went on the internet and found some interesting advice on characteristics of a dysfunctional relationship and seeing if we could find parallels with our relationship with water in urban and rural areas. I found an example from Soulpoint.com (Lania Desmond, Psychotherapist). She says to think love then speak. I'll try to follow that example. Let's see:

First off, I am going to set aside the issue of long distance relationships with water and whether they can work in the long run. In California, that's a whole other issue that we can take up separately.

**A dysfunctional relationship has certain qualities about it. These qualities are as follows:**

(1) There is always something to fix in the relationship.
(2) You feel like you're settling. (Gw overdraft)
(3) Who you are is diminished in the relationship.
(4) Your needs are not met in one way or another.

(5) You feel trapped.

(6) You feel taken for granted.

(7) You feel treated like a possession, and your partner is pre-occupied with controlling you. (Come back to this)

(8) You find other ways to satisfy yourself to keep your mind off how unhappy you are in the situation. (city council ignores water and builds a police station)

(9) When it's good, it's really good, but when it's bad it's horrible. (It reminds me of Paso Robles, Wine and Water)

**On the other hand, a healthy relationship has these characteristics:**

(1) You feel honored.

(2) You feel more alive.

(3) There is nurturing and support for you to become more of who you are. (cities/counties named after water ways)

(4) There is strength coming from your relationship allowing you to explore ways to expand into new territories.

(5) Each brings healing into the other through depth and security.

(6) The relationship causes you to create a new dynamic based on the future rather than on what has been known in the past. (Downtown Napa example below)

(7) Your partner is more than you would have known to ask for. (cities and water resources help each other)

(8) You wonder how you ever got this lucky.

So you see, improving the relationship between communities and the natural water cycle is going to make a much brighter future.

As we seek to improve our relationship with water, I think we need to revisit our dysfunctional obsession with possessing water, and address this by emphasizing the empowerment of our communities that comes with establishing water supply reliability and clean water through the sharing of water and integrated water management and governance. As we see in a year of historic drought very vividly, the concept of ownership of water through water rights can be illusory, and we learn that in fact, the opposite is often true, that the water has ownership over us. To take this metaphor further, this year we are seeing dysfunction in our state related to custody battles in the relationship over who has custody over "junior". This is a path toward disintegration of California's society, which we should try to avoid, and build healthy relationships with water, over time.

We state agencies all had a hand in fashioning the California Water Action Plan, and I think it is a bold step forward in bringing our agencies into better alignment, recognizing a slate of shared, common goals for improving California's sustainability, which as the State Water Board's vision statement indicates, "A sustainable California is made possible by clean water and water supply availability for both human uses and environmental resource protection."

A sustainable California is not possible without reckoning with water resources, their dynamic nature, the changes that will come with climate change, surface water and groundwater interactions, and challenges that come with managing droughts and floods.

What is a sustainable California? What is meant by sustainability? It is the capacity to endure. For humans sustainability is the long term maintenance of well-being, which has economic, environmental and social dimensions. In ecology, sustainability describes how biological systems remain diverse and productive over time. As we restore functions of water systems to achieve sustainability, we seek to remove the simplifications we have imposed on the water environment in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Untangling 20th Century Infrastructure – How to Fund Integration?

These simplifications of the water environment relate to our management of water supply, water quality, and flood control in isolation of each other. A classic example is in Santa Ana Region, a model of integrated water management, where the Watershed Protection Authority is yet still grappling with regional flood control concrete channels that protect communities from flooding, but prevent needed groundwater recharge of the storm water in that area for a clean and reliable water supply.

Integrated water management brings economic prosperity. Downtown Napa, where my fellow Board member Dee Dee D'adamo grew up, used to be a place that was avoided. The area around the river was dangerous from both flooding and crime perspectives. Today, it is a boomtown of private development, spurred on by the Living River project, where the traditional flood control trapezoidal model was set aside with preference for a natural flood control design, incorporating wetlands and riparian restoration. This attracted $99 million in Obama stimulus money as well as a string of new hotels and other development. Bringing back the river has brought back the community in the City of Napa, and brought it into a healthy relationship with its namesake

river.  We can replicate this renewal of relationship throughout our state.

As we take this on, we ask “What factors in a region are working at cross purposes, creating a dysfunctional relationship with water, and how could a more integrated approach simultaneously address multiple challenges of public health, flooding, water supply and compliance?  How can we convince ratepayers to fund the integrated projects?”

William Bell was a blues artist that wrote the song, You Don’t Miss Your Water until Your Well Runs Dry.  Residents in Paso Robles and eastern Stanislaus County are starting to miss their water this year because of increased vineyards and almond orchards, housing development, and associated diversions coupled with record drought conditions.  This and other parts of the state are dealing with potentially irreversible water-related impacts that require integration and management at a whole new level. Nothing like a crisis to spur discussion and action.  Convincing ratepayers to fund integrated projects requires communication, which probably includes a recipe of equal parts fear and hope. The fear of what Paso Robles is confronting and the hope of what Napa is achieving.

These are 21st century challenges for California Water, an untangling of the infrastructure that evolved based on water resource planning conducted in hydrologic and institutional isolation, conducted in the silos of municipal and agricultural water supply, flood control, sewer collection systems and treatment, storm drainage and so on.

I believe the key to achieving our vision of a sustainable California is integration of our collective governance of water in its many dimensions, as you are doing, but we can do more, and address the issues identified by IRWM stakeholders in DWR's strategic planning effort.

How do we make sure that DACs and Tribes are integrated equitably into the water management structure? Maybe one of the keys is recognizing that our structure, based on competition, is "selecting" for a certain kind of IRWM, and maybe we need to rethink the idea that different parts of our state need to "Compete" to receive needed water system funding. At the State Board we've eliminated the concept of "competitive projects list " in the SRF with the recognition that we should not have our communtieis competing for water – that safe drinking water is a basic human right, as codified in law in AB385. Let's think about IRWM and the concept of competition vs. real need for

assistance, both technical and financial. Let's not devolve into a state of "Pay to Play" – let's not create disintegration in our efforts of integration.

Your efforts to integrate water management and lead us into the 21st century can begin with identification of barriers to integration, and identification of potential solutions working with your agency partners, as well as private sector and NGO partners. The solutions may be within your existing authorities or may require creation of new authorities, including combining jurisdictions. When you hear "we've always done things that way", don't be afraid to challenge folks to consider a new way – a way that treats storm water as a resource not a hazard, a way that treats wastewater as a resource not a waste, a way that re-organizes our governance of water along watershed and groundwater-basin boundaries. The new way seeks to leverage water for all the benefits it provides our citizens and to be creative about untangling 20th century infrastructure to create a new vision of 21st century, sustainable, integrated water infrastructure. It's not green infrastructure, or gray infrastructure. It's both and it is our clean water infrastructure for our shared future. It's a future where we do not miss our water, where our well does not run dry, and our communities are in healthy relationship with the water that sustains us.